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16世紀におけるランサン王国（ラオス）の遷都について

増 原 善 之

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On the Relocation of the Capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom (Laos)
in the Sixteenth Century¹

Yoshiyuki MASUHARA

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Abstract

This paper aims to clarify the changes in the economic environment surrounding the Lan Xang² Kingdom in the sixteenth century and to re-examine the significance of the relocation of its capital from Luang Phabang to Vientiane. The author argues that with the rapid expansion of international maritime trade in Southeast Asia, from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, Ayutthaya and Cambodia's need for products from Laos escalated more and more in response to the increasing international demand for forest products³ and precious metals. This caused the center of the Lan Xang economy to move from Luang Phabang to Vientiane. The relocation of the capital was one of the most symbolic responses of Lan Xang to the changes of the economic situation in the then mainland Southeast Asia.

1.Introduction

According to the Lao chronicles, the Lan Xang Kingdom (Laos) came into being with its capital at Luang Phabang in the middle of the fourteenth century. It is generally known that Lan Xang greatly developed from the sixteenth century onwards. Under the reign of King Xetthathirat (1548-71) in particular the kingdom expanded its domain southeast, and shifted its capital from Luang Phabang to Vientiane. On the reasons for the relocation of the capital there have been many explanations given. For

example, Maha Sila Viravong, a pioneer in studies on the history of Laos, stated the reasons as follows: (i) Luang Phabang is too small for a capital, whereas Vientiane is a bigger city with a large area of cultivable land and an abundant supply of foodstuffs, and (ii) Luang Phabang is located on the invasion route of the Burmese [Sila 1964: 58].

On the first point, it goes without saying that the wide Vientiane plain has such a higher potential in producing foodstuffs than the narrow Luang Phabang basin, that the former can feed a far larger population than the latter. Whether or not the difference in the geographical conditions of the two areas was a vital matter in the historical context, however, is another issue to be seriously considered. Regrettably, we do not have enough data to examine whether in the first half of the sixteenth century the population in Luang Phabang had so greatly increased that it was difficult to locate new arable land. From my own investigations, involving a series of interviews with Lao Loum and Lao Theung people⁴ in Luang Phabang Province, March-April 1999, it was made clear that food production was not always a crucial issue for Luang Phabang residents. On this point, an ex-merchant of Lao Loum (76 years old then) in Luang Phabang told as follows:

Luang Phabang residents did not engage in agriculture very much. Many of the residents were merchants. If they needed rice, they could buy it from neighboring hill tribes (Lao Theung people — the author of this paper —). They did not have to buy it from Vientiane, because the population of Luang Phabang was not so great⁵.

Even though the farmers in the Luang Phabang basin could not meet the whole demand of Luang Phabang residents for foodstuffs, the latter still could get enough food through trade or exchange with neighboring hill tribes, namely, ancestors of Lao Theung people⁶. If this situation has continued for many centuries, it can be surmised that the difference in geographical conditions between the old capital and the new one is not the principal reason for the relocation of the capital.

Secondly, the news that the Lan Na Kingdom (the current northern Thailand) surrendered to the Toungoo Dynasty of Burma in 1558 must have shocked the Lao royalty and nobility in Luang Phabang. When the Burmese army first attacked Lan Xang in 1564, however, there were many members of the royal family still living in Luang Phabang [Lorrillard 1995: 157]. Why didn't they seek refuge in other places beforehand in order to protect their lives and properties from the impending danger? Furthermore, Burma was not the sole redoubtable foe of Lan Xang at that time. The Ayutthaya Kingdom, which was making rapid progress in the first half of the sixteenth century, must also have been a serious menace to Lan Xang. Actually, in 1533 the Ayutthaya armed forces, after capturing Meuang Viang Khuk⁷, crossed the Mekong

River and approached Vientiane (the Lan Xang army finally succeeded in repelling the enemy). If the military threat from the neighboring kingdoms was an important reason for the relocation of the capital, why did King Xetthathirat take the trouble to choose Vientiane, which was more liable to suffer an Ayutthaya's invasion than Luang Phabang, as a new capital?

By the way, when turning our eyes towards the whole of contemporary Southeast Asia, we can easily realize that it was in the midst of the "Age of Commerce" when international maritime trade in the region rapidly expanded⁸. If, as Anthony Reid states, inland trade also received a great stimulus from the boom in seaborne trade during the "Age of Commerce" [Reid 1993: 53], the unprecedented economic growth in Southeast Asia probably changed even the basic properties of the inland kingdom of Lan Xang. Though I have no intention of denying the views of Maha Sila Viravong, as will be later examined, it is likely that the changes of economic situation in the then mainland Southeast Asia is also related to the relocation of the Lan Xang capital. This paper aims to clarify the changes in the economic environment surrounding Lan Xang Kingdom in the sixteenth century and to re-examine the significance of the relocation of its capital from Luang Phabang to Vientiane.

2. Vientiane before the relocation of the capital

According to the Lao chronicles, King Fa Ngum established Lan Xang in 1353 with its capital at Luang Phabang. This ancient city, which lies halfway between the "northern inland area" with its center at Yunnan, China, and the "southern coastal area" consisting of port polities along the coast of the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, had some economic relations with both areas at all times. The economic growth of Yunnan from the mid thirteenth century onwards and the incorporation of Lan Xang into the Chinese tribute system under the Ming Dynasty probably caused the Luang Phabang economy to connect with the "northern inland area" more closely than with the "southern coastal area". It goes without saying that the expansion of overland trade with the "northern inland area" is one of the most important factors contributing to the founding of Lan Xang in Luang Phabang and its growth in a later period. At any rate, we should not forget that Luang Phabang prospered as one of the centers of inland trade in northern mainland Southeast Asia⁹.

On the other side, Vientiane was also an ancient city situated on the Mekong River, about 430 km downstream from Luang Phabang. Though there are some historical remains left and chronicles referring to this city, the appearance of the ancient Vientiane is still vague. The oldest relic in the place, the founding period of which we can estimate to a certain extent, is generally accepted to be a stone Buddha image in the style of Dvaravati (Mon) art (founded in the 6th or 7th century), which was discovered in Thalath Village, Kaeo Udom District, Vientiane Province [Bunheng 1991: 37-38]. In addition, we can mention a few vestiges of Khmer culture left in Vientiane. For instance, there is a stone figure of King Jayavarman VII (1181-1218)

of the Khmer Kingdom, today installed in That Luang Temple, Vientiane Capital, and an inscription written in Sanskrit referring to the construction of the hospital by the same king, discovered in Sayfong District, Vientiane Capital [ibid.: 39-40]. The first inscription (1292) of the Sukhothai Kingdom also refers to Vientiane and Viang Kham¹⁰ [PMO 1978: 26]. These pieces of evidence show that long before the founding of Lan Xang there had already been some communities existing in the Vientiane plain and that in some periods these communities were under the cultural influences of the external world.

Some versions of the Lao chronicles refer to an interesting folk story entitled “*Canthaphanit*”, the synopsis of which is as follows:

There was a person in Meuang Vientiane named *Canthaphanit*, who frequently came up to trade in Luang Phabang. One day, on his way to Luang Phabang, silver and gold stuck to the end of his pole [for punting the boat], but he did not take it, on the instructions of an elder monk. When he arrived in Luang Phabang, he saw a lot of silver and gold on both banks of the Mekong River. He brought the silver and gold to give all the poor people and beggars. Luang Phabang citizens saw his excellent acts and crowned him king of Luang Phabang¹¹.

Though we can not verify this story, it probably reflects that Luang Phabang and Vientiane had held some commercial relations since the ancient period and those who engaged in trade inevitably had many opportunities to amass not only economic profits but also political powers.

Many versions of the Lao chronicles accordantly relate that King Fa Ngum, the founder of Lan Xang, descending from Luang Phabang, subjugated Vientiane and Viang Kham. Even though his military movement was a historical fact, it is not yet clear how successive kings in Luang Phabang ruled the Vientiane plain. A chronicle recounts that King Fa Ngum made six important cities “*Khuan Meuang* (cardinal cities)”, namely, Meuang Vientiane, Meuang Viang Kham, Meuang Viang Kae¹², Meuang Phra Nam Hung¹³, Meuang Pak Huay Luang¹⁴, and Meuang Xiang Sa¹⁵ [Sila and Nuan 1994: 46]. In a later period, King Xainyachakkaphat Phaen Phaeo (1442-79/80) served as a governor of Vientiane before ascending to the throne. King Phothisarath (1520-47) also changed his permanent residence to Vientiane from 1533 onwards [Sila 1964: 43, 50], even if Luang Phabang was still the capital of the kingdom. These accounts show that the ruling classes of Lan Xang had given great importance to Vientiane and its vicinities throughout since the founding of the kingdom. That is, Vientiane did not just start to grow with the relocation of the capital. On the contrary, by the first half of the sixteenth century at the latest it was already a prosperous and big city. If so, what brought such prosperity to Vientiane in that period? In order to

answer this question, we have to consider the economic environment surrounding Lan Xang from the second half of the fifteenth century through the first half of the sixteenth century.



Fig.1 Mainland Southeast Asia in the 16th Century

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| ① Satchanalai | ② Sawankhalok | ③ Phichai |
| ④ Sukhothai | ⑤ Phitsanulok | ⑥ Kamphaeng Phet |
| ⑦ Phichit | ⑧ Nakhon Sawan | |

3. The “Southern Coastal Area” and Lan Xang

While the early Lan Xang with its capital at Luang Phabang was growing by holding close economic relations with the “northern inland area”, the “southern coastal area” was also about to enter into the new economic situation generally known as the “Age of Commerce”. That is, many port polities came into being and rapidly grew all along the Southeast Asian coast. Most of them were both transit trade ports between the East and the West, and collecting centers of natural products from its hinterland. Ayutthaya and Cambodia, which were the principal port states in mainland Southeast Asia, particularly came to need Lao products more and more with the expansion of their foreign trade, as will be later considered.

1) Early Ayutthaya

The Ayutthaya Kingdom had possessed a high economic potential as a transit trade port since its founding period. Its foreign trade was related to China more firmly than to any other states, which would be a basic trend all through the Ayutthaya period. On the other side, the commercial relations between Ayutthaya and the inland states such as Lan Xang were then still restricted to certain limits [Masuhara 2003: 33-4]. In the second half of the fifteenth century, however, there appeared remarkable changes in the economic relations between Ayutthaya and its neighboring regions. That is, Ayutthaya came to take a more active part in the international maritime trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, and at the same time started to spread its political and economic influence through the inland area.

Firstly, Victor Lieberman states on the international maritime trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean as follows:

According to the *Mon ya-zawin* (Mon chronicle), starting in the 1450s and 1460s merchants “from distant towns and cities arrived in great numbers [in Lower Burma], [hitherto] unusual wearing apparel became abundant, and the people had fine clothes and prospered exceedingly.” Mon and Burmese histories dwell at length on expanding diplomatic and commercial embassies in the second half of the fifteenth century. [Lieberman 1984: 26]

Ayutthaya's seizure of control of the towns of Tenasserim (by the 1460s) and Tavoy (1488) on the Andaman coast seems to have been intended primarily to secure direct access to the international trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean [Wyatt 1984: 86]. Duarte Barbosa actually records the flourishing commerce of Tenasserim with the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean in the beginning of the sixteenth century as follows:

There are many Muslim and pagan merchants in Tenasserim. They trade every kind of merchandise and have their own ships, by which they go to trade in Bengal, Malacca and the other places. Benzoin of high quality is widely cultivated in the interior [of Tenasserim], ... Many ships of the Muslims and ships coming from the other places come to gather in the port of Tenasserim and they bring various kinds of goods to sell ...¹⁶. [FAD 1985: 51]

On the other hand, Tomé Pires describes the foreign merchants in Ayutthaya in the same period as follows:

Siam is an extensive country, and is filled with a great number of people,

cities, lords and foreign merchants. Most of the foreigners are Chinese because the Siamese trade is conducted chiefly in China. ... There are very few Muslims in Siam and the Siamese do not like the Muslims. However, there are Arabs, Persians, Bengalese, many Klings¹⁷, Chinese, and other foreigners [in Siam]¹⁸. [Pires 1966: 212-214]

This account shows that in the beginning of the sixteenth century Muslim merchants probably came to settle in Ayutthaya one after another, but their number was still very few. Fernão Mendes Pinto refers to the number of houses in Ayutthaya in 1554 as follows:

Some people say that in the city of Ayutthaya there are 400,000 houses in all and 100,000 houses among them are those of foreigners from various places of the earth. ... There are about 30,000 houses of the Muslims in the city ...¹⁹. [FAD 1985: 75, 81]

If both accounts of Pires and Pinto are credible, it can be surmised that the number of Muslims in Ayutthaya rapidly increased in the first half of the sixteenth century. As Plubplung Kongchana explains, the occupation of Malacca by the Portuguese (1511) probably caused the Muslims, who had engaged in trade with their bases at Malacca, to flee to Ayutthaya [Plubplung 1995: 237]. Anyway, the increase of Muslims in Ayutthaya undoubtedly reflects that Ayutthaya came to have close commercial relations with the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

The expansion of trade with the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean must have caused Ayutthaya to call for more goods for the Indian and Middle Eastern markets than before. Though Tomé Pires describes that Ayutthaya traded in Tenasserim with Pasai, Pedir, Kedah, Pegu and Bengal and that Gujarati²⁰ merchants came to the port of Ayutthaya every year²¹ [Pires 1966: 219], he does not specify any merchandise which merchants from the aforementioned ports purchased in the Ayutthaya Kingdom. On the other side, he records the commercial activities of Aden²² and Gujarati merchants in the trading ports along the Andaman Sea as follows:

[Aden merchants] trade with Pegu, and take lac, benzoin, musk, jewelry, rice from Siam and Bengal, and Chinese goods coming via Ayutthaya, back home. ... Every year one of the Gujarati ships comes to the port of Martaban and the port of Dagon (Yangon), ... and takes large quantities of lac ... together with benzoin, silver and jewelry back home²³. [*ibid.*: 64, 209]

Merchandise seen in these accounts does not seem to be very different from the commodities which merchants from India and the Middle East purchased in

Ayutthaya. If so, where were such commodities brought to Ayutthaya from? As some European traders in that period describe, most of the aforementioned commodities, excepting rice and Chinese goods, seem to have been brought from the interior areas of mainland Southeast Asia, such as Lan Na and Lan Xang, to Ayutthaya. For instance, João de Barros refers to the commercial relations between Ayutthaya and its inland areas as follows:

Their (Siamese) commodities are silver and various kinds of jewelry coming from the kingdom of Chiang Mai (Lan Na). The kingdom exports its goods via Siam because Siam has direct routes to the coast. ... In the kingdom of Siam there are gold, silver and other kinds of minerals, which are sent to be sold in the various countries. But the silver actually comes from the mountains in Laos²⁴. [FAD 1985: 68-69]

In addition, Gaspar da Cruz also describes a similar case as follows:

Before that these Laos were subdued by the Burmese, they carried to Siam, and to Cambodia, and to Pegu some very good musk and gold, whereof is affirmed to be great store in that country. [Boxer 1953: 76]

Therefore, the more the international maritime trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean expanded, the more Ayutthaya's demand for goods from the inland area must have intensified as it sought to secure a continuous supply of important trading commodities. This probably accelerated Ayutthaya's success in spreading its political and economic influence across a wider range of the inland area than before. From its founding in 1351 onwards, Ayutthaya actually had attempted to assert its authority in three directions, namely the east (Cambodia), the south (Malay Peninsula) and the north (Sukhothai and Lan Na). In the case of the spread of power into the north, in the beginning of the fifteenth century an Ayutthaya's chief resident was installed in Sukhothai, and the status of the king of Sukhothai was reduced to that of a vassal ruler. In 1438, Sukhothai was finally incorporated as a province into Ayutthaya [Wyatt 1984: 69-70].

According to Yoneo Ishii, *Kotmai Tra Sam Duang* (Three Seals Code) includes three laws referring to the principalities to which Ayutthaya extended its authority. i.e. *Kot Monthianbaan* (Palatine Law, compiled in 1468), *Phra Ayakaan Tamnaeng Na Thahaan Huameuang* (Law of the Military and Provincial Hierarchies, 1466), and *Phrathammanuun* (Law on Official Seals, 1743)²⁵ [Ishii 1999: 127-129]. The second part of *Kot Monthianbaan* divides the provincial principalities into two groups, that is, *Phaya Maha Nakhon* and *Phratetsarat*. *Phaya Maha Nakhon* consisted of main local principalities that had been independent states but which had later been incorporated

as provinces into Ayutthaya. Though they were expected to be under the close control of the capital, in reality the rulers in each principality were succeeded one after another in their clan. Consequently, the principalities of *Phaya Maha Nakhon* had some free hands in managing the internal government. *Phratetsarat* were composed of principalities far away from the capital, which were almost never actually subjected to the control of the central government and only admitted the superiority of Ayutthaya by presenting gold trees and silver trees to the king of Ayutthaya every three years.

On the other side, *Phra Ayakaan Tamnaeng Na Thahaan Huameuang* divided the local principalities into four classes, that is, *Meuang Ek*, *Meuang Tho*, *Meuang Tri* and *Meuang Cattwa* (first, second, third and fourth-class principalities respectively). The former three classes were made up of the important local principalities, which were similar to those of *Phaya Maha Nakhon*. The principalities belonging to *Meuang Cattwa* stood in *Wong Ratchathani* (capital province) and were under the direct control of the king. Therefore, when examining the spread of influence to the provinces, we must pay attention to the status of the distribution of *Phaya Maha Nakhon* in *Kot Monthianbaan* (see Table 1) together with *Meuang Ek*, *Meuang Tho* and *Meuang Tri* in *Phra Ayakaan Tamnaeng Na Thahaan Huameuang* (see Table 2). H.G. Quaritch Wales explains that in the reforming process of the provincial administration system, King Naresuan (1590-1605) abolished *Phaya Maha Nakhon* and constituted the provinces outside the capital province in three classes, known as *Meuang Ek*, *Meuang Tho*, and *Meuang Tri* [Wales 1965: 109]. If so, Table 2 probably reflects the provincial administration system at some time after the end of the sixteenth century²⁶.

Table 1 *Phaya Maha Nakhon* in *Kot Monthianbaan*

Phitsanulok	Satchanalai	Sukhothai
Kamphaeng Phet	Nakhon Si Thammarat	Nakhon Ratchasima
Tanawasi (Tenasserim)	Thawai (Tavoy)	

Source: [Ishii 1999: 162]

Table 2 *Meuang Ek*, *Meuang Tho* and *Meuang Tri* in *Phra Ayakaan Tamnaeng Na Thahaan Huameuang*

<i>Meuang Ek</i>	Phitsanulok	Nakhon Si Thammarat	
<i>Meuang Tho</i>	Sawankhalok	Sukhothai	Kamphaeng Phet
	Phetchabun	Nakhon Ratchasima	Thanao (Tenasserim)
<i>Meuang Tri</i>	Phichai	Phichit	Nakhon Sawan
	Chanthaburi	Chaiya	Phattalung
	Chumphon		

Source: [Ishii 1999: 144]

One noteworthy point is that the northern principalities (written in bold type in the tables) form almost half of those in both tables, which probably shows the significance of the northern region for the provincial administration of Ayutthaya. When considering the economic relations between Ayutthaya and Lan Xang particularly, we should examine the economic role of Meuang Phichai (along the Nan River) and Meuang Phetchabun (along the Pa Sak River).

From olden times the routes between Luang Phabang, Nan and Sukhothai were main traffic routes connecting northern Laos and the lower region of northern Thailand [Masuhara 2003: 26-7]. In addition, we can assume another route descended from Luang Phabang to Phitsanulok as seen in the maps drawn by French explorers at the end of the nineteenth century [Pavie 1999: 29, 52]. Travelers probably went down from Luang Phabang to Meuang Pak Lai (in Xainyaburi Province, Laos) by boat along the Mekong River, descended southwest via Meuang Phichai (in Uttaradit Province, Thailand) and continued further downstream along the Nan River, finally arriving in Phitsanulok. Suttiphol Rattanasongthum also mentions the transportation in the upper reaches of the Nan River as follows:

The region around *Bang Pho* and *Tha It*, which was a dependency of Meuang Phichai, is an old port which transshipped goods coming from Sipsong Phanna, Luang Phabang, Phrae, Nan and sent them to be sold in the Chao Phraya River basin, because big boats could easily go upstream only to *Bang Pho* and *Tha It*, and north of the region the river was shallow and had lots of rapids. Therefore, transport ships from the south gathered in *Bang Pho* and *Tha It* ... from *Bang Pho* and *Tha It* there were land transportation routes for Nan, and from there they could go up to Luang Phabang and Vientiane by boat. [Suttiphol 1988: 28-29]

Though Suttiphol Rattanasongthum does not tell from which period this situation had actually existed, it is unlikely that the geographical conditions around Meuang Phichai would easily change. If Meuang Phichai was made to be *Meuang Tri* for its economic role in connecting the inland areas with the Chao Phraya River basin, the commercial relations between both regions had already been open long before the reform of the provincial administration system by King Naresuan. In addition, there is an inscription dated 1577 in Meuang Pak Lai [SMH 1977: No.704], which possibly reflects that town's importance as a connecting point between Luang Phabang and the lower region of northern Thailand. Therefore, it can be said that by the second half of the sixteenth century at the latest, there existed commercial relations between Luang Phabang and Ayutthaya with a connecting point at Meuang Phichai.

On the other hand, as Yoneo Ishii argues, one of the economic advantages of Ayutthaya is that it had easy access to various kinds of forest products, which were

highly sought after in foreign markets, from its rich hinterland through the Chao Phraya River and the Pa Sak River [Ishii 1999: 80]. Hence, Phetchabun made to be *Meuang Tho* in *Phra Ayakaan Tamnaeng Na Thahaan Huameuang* was also probably one of the important principalities as a center for collecting products in the Pa Sak River basin. In addition, Phetchabun possibly had another important role in connection with Lan Xang. Srisakara Vallibhotama also states as follows:

In the reign of the King Chakkraphat of Ayutthaya (1548-69)²⁷, Lan Xang probably greatly grew. ... [They] entered into the upper reaches of the Pa Sak River in the Lomkao District, Lomsak District, and reached the Pettchabun District. [Srisakara 1997: 264]

Furthermore, the “Phra That Si Song Rak Inscription” (founded in 1563) of Meuang Dan Sai (in Loei Province, Thailand)²⁸ implies that the powers of Lan Xang and Ayutthaya, which were both expanding their influences out then, collided with each other at a point between the Huang River (a tributary of the Mekong River) and the upper reaches of the Pa Sak River. The Pa Sak River was an important commercial route, which brought various kinds of forest products from the Mekong and the Huang River basin to Ayutthaya in times of peace. Phetchabun could be one of the important strongholds of Ayutthaya for holding back an invasion of Lan Xang²⁹.

To sum up, with the expansion of trade with the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, Ayutthaya's need for various kinds of forest products and precious metals, which were highly sought after in the Indian and Middle Eastern markets, from the inland area of mainland Southeast Asia including Lan Xang escalated more and more. This probably accelerated Ayutthaya's success in spreading its political and economic influence through Lan Xang. In that process, Meuang Phichai and Meuang Phetchabun fulfilled important roles as connecting points between both kingdoms.

2) Cambodia after Angkor

It is generally accepted that the attack on Angkor in 1431 by King Borommara II of Ayutthaya is one of the main reasons that caused Cambodia to abandon the capital and to move it to Basan³⁰. According to a Chinese account, however, besides the king of Cambodia in Angkor there was another king in Basan who paid tribute to the Chinese Emperor in 1372 and 73. In addition, there remains laterite ruins in the Angkor period in Basan. That is, Basan did not just come into being after the abandonment of Angkor, but was probably one of the local powers having already existed since the Angkor period. As several versions of the Cambodian chronicles relate, in 1432 King Ponhea Yat of Basan moved the capital to Phnom Penh [Ishii and Sakurai 1999: 237-240]. Needless to say, Phnom Penh, which is located at

the confluence of the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap River, had an advantage in controlling riverine trade in the middle and lower reaches of the Mekong River together with the Tonle Sap Lake region. Therefore, the relocation of Cambodia's commercial center from the northern shore of the Tonle Sap Lake to the Mekong River basin in the fifteenth century was undoubtedly connected with the expansion of international maritime trade in Southeast Asia.

One of the noteworthy points is that the foreign trade of Cambodia was considerably dependent on procurement of goods from the Mekong River basin, particularly from Lan Xang, as described by Gaspar da Cruz in the mid sixteenth century as follows:

These Laos came to Cambodia down a river many days' journey, ... When these Laos do return to their country, it takes them three months, as they go against the stream. This river causes a wonder in the land of Cambodia, worthy of reciting. [Boxer 1953: 77-78]

In addition, Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio refers to the importance of Lan Xang for the Cambodian economy in the late sixteenth century as follows:

In Cambodia, there are gold, silver, precious stones, lead, tin brass, silk, cotton, incense, gum, benzoin, lacquer, ivory, rice, elephants, buffaloes, horses, cattle, goats, deer, chickens and fruit as plentiful as it is savory. Besides, that country holds the trade for the whole of Asia and it is the necessary door which will open to the priceless wealth of the Kingdom of Laos. [San Antonio 1998: 87]

These accounts show that after the relocation of its commercial center, Cambodia started to deepen its economic relations with the Mekong River basin. By the mid sixteenth century at the latest, riverine trade between Lan Xang and Cambodia was already prospering. Some kinds of Lao products were sent to Cambodia along the Mekong River and were further exported to international markets. Lan Xang seems to have been an important producing district of valuable commodities for Cambodia. Thus, the same as in the case of Ayutthaya, the more the maritime trade in Southeast Asia expanded and the international demand for such merchandise increased, the more Cambodia came to need Lao products.

4. The Responses of Lan Xang to the New Economic Situation

As examined in the previous section, with the rapid expansion of international maritime trade in Southeast Asia, Ayutthaya and Cambodia came to need Lao products more and more in order to meet the increasing international demand for

forest products and precious metals. On the other side, what responses did Lan Xang show to this new economic situation? In this section, the responses of Lan Xang will be considered from two aspects, namely the reinforcement of political power and the expansion of the economic network.

1) Reinforcement of Political Power

Like other ancient kingdoms in Southeast Asia, the early Lan Xang was only a loose combination of various principalities having considerable political independency. Though the Lan Xang king tried to send his sons, younger brothers, and other relatives to govern important principalities in each place, he often encountered resistance from the local powers and was compelled to make a compromise with them. The domain directly governed by the king was probably limited to Luang Phabang and its vicinities. Under this conventional ruling system, it must have been difficult for the central government to collect local products from the extensive areas and to constantly export large quantities of merchandise to foreign markets. In other words, Lan Xang would have tried to improve its ruling system in efficiency and to reinforce its political power through increasingly wider areas in order to meet the growing international demand for Lao products.

On this point, Souneth Phothisane argues that the positions of *Meuang Saen* (the head of the military administration) and *Meuang Chan* (the head of the civil one) were probably separated from about the reign of King Xainyachakkaphat Phaen Phaeo (i.e. in the second half of the fifteenth century). The royal administration was first divided clearly into these two categories (military and civil) in the reign of King Xetthathirat [Souneth 1996: 447-448]. Martin Stuart-Fox also states that from the Lao chronicles we can gain some idea of the reorganization of Lan Xang carried out after the war with Vietnam (1479-80) during the reigns of King Suvanna Banlang and King La Saen Tai (i.e. in the end of the fifteenth century). That is, the increasingly complex central administration was in the hands of officials responsible for specific services, such as defense, finance, foreign contacts and trade. Other officials were in charge of the collection of taxes, and of the network of spies who informed on the activities of tributary rulers [Stuart-Fox 1998: 73]. Even though these reforms of the ruling system were actually put into practice, we do not know exactly, due to lack of historical record referring to the then political situation, how they contributed towards promoting the administrative efficiency. Instead of directly studying the changes of the ruling system, I would like to consider the reinforcement of the political power of Lan Xang through the examination of several cultural phenomena likely reflecting its political development.

Firstly, it is well known that Buddhist inscriptions written in Lao or Pali language are widely distributed throughout Laos and northeastern Thailand. The earliest one among them is that dated 1350, found on the site of the Rae Village

Nursery, Phangkhon District, Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand [Dhawaj 1987: 225-227]. The second earliest one is that dated 1487, inscribed on the pedestal of a Buddha image, which is now kept in the Luang Phabang Museum (the ex-Royal Palace), Laos [SMH 1977: No.515]. The third one is that dated 1491, also inscribed on the pedestal of a Buddha image, which is enshrined in the Sisaket Temple, Vientiane Capital, Laos [Gagneux 1975: 81-83]. As will be later examined, from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards the tradition of founding Buddhist inscriptions broadly diffused through the kingdom and the number of newly founded inscriptions also rapidly increased. Because Buddhism and political power were closely related to each other in those days, almost all founders of these inscriptions were ruling classes such as kings and nobles. In other words, where an inscription was founded, the political influence of its founder reached that place. Therefore, the widening distribution of newly founded inscriptions through the country from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards probably reflects that the political power of the central government simultaneously started to reach much broader areas than before.

Secondly, Souneth Phothisane states that the oldest version of the existent Lao royal chronicles is that transliterated and printed under the title of Nangseu Pheun Khun Burom Raxathirat (the Story of Khun Burom)³¹. This was composed in the year of “*Tao-Yi*” under the reign of King Kham Kong of the Phuan Kingdom (the current Xiang Khvang, Laos), that is, the year 1422 [Souneth 1996: 29-30]. However, this version itself clearly tells that King Kham Kong and King Suvanna Banlang (1480-86) of Lan Xang decided the border between both kingdoms [LLD 1967: 59-60]. If so, King Kham Kong must be contemporary with King Suvanna Banlang. The year of “*Tao-Yi*” under the reign of King Kham Kong would be the year 1482, not 1422³². In addition, there are other old versions composed in 1479 under the reign of King Xainyachakkaphat Phaen Phaeo [Souneth 1996: 32-34]. Hence, it can be surmised that the tradition of composing royal chronicles in Lan Xang had already begun by the end of the fifteenth century at the latest. Then, what meaning does the introduction of this new tradition have in the historical context? It is generally explained that royal chronicles, which especially emphasize the royal genealogy and great achievements of the successive kings, were composed with the intention of claiming legitimacy of the king in succeeding to the throne and ruling his subjects. If so, the inception of the composing of royal chronicles possibly shows that a need for legitimating the ruling dynasty had arisen in that period.

Thirdly, it is generally thought that the earliest version of the existent Lao codes is *Ban Kotmai Thammasat Khun Burom* (the Code of Khun Burom)³³. Martin Stuart-Fox states that it was written in 1422 [Stuart-Fox 1998: 46], possibly because the Code of Khun Burom is appended to the aforesaid Story of Khun Burom. As explained above, however, the year 1422 would be 1482. On the other hand, Some scholars mention that the Code of Khun Burom was transmitted orally from generation to

generation before being formally recorded in the reign of King Visun (1501-20) [Mayoury 1996: 73]. Due to a lack of historical records, it is difficult to date the exact compiling year of the Code of Khun Burom. However, we can conclude at least that the traditional rules and teachings handed down from ancestors by word of mouth had started to be written down in the form of code around 1500. It likely shows that a necessity for a more efficient maintenance of the social order had arisen in that period.

Incidentally, is the fact that the diffusion of the tradition of founding Buddhist inscriptions, the composition of royal chronicles, and the compilation of codes, all began in Lan Xang at almost same time, i.e. around 1500, a mere accident? I deem, far from an accident, that these cultural phenomena are closely related to each other and are some by-products of the political developments in that period. As mentioned above, the widening distribution of newly founded inscriptions through the country probably reflects that the political power of the central government started to reach much broader areas than before. This means that those who had not hitherto been under the control of the Lan Xang king were newly incorporated as members of the kingdom on a large scale in that time. Some of these new members were likely various kinds of ethnic groups who were remarkably different from the dominant Lao people in language, religion, customs and so on. Under this situation, the Lan Xang king must have attempted to make them accept himself as their master and embrace Lao traditional customs as their standard. Needless to say, the composition of royal chronicles, claiming that the Lan Xang king was a direct descendant of King Khun Burom, was one of the most useful ways for legitimating the rule of the Lan Xang king. The compilation of codes was likely very helpful in maintaining the order in the new Lao society including various kinds of ethnic groups as well.

Through the examination of these three cultural phenomena, it has become clear that from the second half of the fifteenth century through the first half of the sixteenth century the political power of the Lan Xang king reached much broader areas than before. As a result, those who had not been under the control of the Lan Xang king were newly incorporated as members of the kingdom on a large scale. Is it probable that this political development of Lan Xang came from the need to collect local products from extensive areas and to constantly export large quantities of merchandise to foreign markets? If so, it can be said the reinforcement of the political power of Lan Xang in that period was one of the visible responses to the new economic situation in Southeast Asia.

2) Expansion of Economic Network

In addition to the political development of Lan Xang, the extensive expansion of its internal economic network from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards should not be overlooked. In this section I would like to explore the expansion of the

network through the examination of the distribution of Lao Buddhist inscriptions. One of the important characteristics of Theravada Buddhism³⁴ is that monasteries can not help being economically dependent on the general public, because monks, who are prohibited by the precepts from producing food, can not live any way without alms from the laity [Ishii 1991: 87]. A town in which there were many Buddhist monasteries must have had economic basis enough to support them materially. Then if we examine the distribution of Buddhist monasteries in each period, we can follow the expansion of the distribution of towns of economical importance. Moreover by tying these towns together, we will be able to draw the outline of the internal economic network in the Lan Xang period. In reality, however, it is difficult to acquire reliable data on the precise founding year of each monastery as most of them are

Table 3 The distribution of Lao Buddhist inscriptions (founded before 1700)

Province Founding Year	Northern Laos		Central Laos			Northeastern Thailand					Total (Pcs.)
	Luang Phabang	Xaiburi	Vientiane Capital*	Vientiane Province*	Borikhamxai	Loei	Nong Khai	Udon Thani	Sakon Nakhon	Nakhon Phanom	
1341-1350									1		1
1481-1490	1										1
1491-1500	1		1								2
1501-1510	2						1			1	4
1511-1520											
1521-1530	3		1				1				5
1531-1540			4				1				5
1541-1550	1		2								3
1551-1560	3		2				4				9
1561-1570	1		5	1		1	3	1			12
1571-1580	1	1	2					1			5
1581-1590	3		4				1				8
1591-1600			5				2	2			9
in the 16 th c.**	2		5				1				8
1601-1610	1		6				2				9
1611-1620	2		5	1						1	9
1621-1630	1		2	1			2				6
1631-1640	1		7				2		1		11
1641-1650	1		9				1			1	12
1651-1660			14				2		1		17
1661-1670	1		3			1	1	2			8
1671-1680	1		8							2	11
1681-1690	1		9				1			3	14
1691-1700	1		1							1	3
in the 17 th c.**	4		11	1	1		1				18
Total	32	1	106	4	1	2	26	6	3	9	190

Source: The author made the table from data given in [Gagneux 1975], [Dhawaj 1987], [SMH 1977] and [Souneth et al. 1992].

* "Vientiane Capital" and "Vientiane Province" are separate provinces.

** "in the 16th c." and "in the 17th c." contain the inscriptions that do not have exact founding years, but are surmised to have been founded in the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century respectively.

given in chronicles composed in later periods and oral traditions. Therefore instead of the distribution of Buddhist monasteries I will examine that of Lao Buddhist inscriptions³⁵ most of which clearly describe the founding year, and which were originally founded in the sites of monasteries.

As seen in Table 3, there are at least 190 Lao Buddhist inscriptions founded before 1700, including stone inscriptions, inscriptions on the pedestals of Buddha images, and other types of inscription. Through the examination of the distribution of these inscriptions, we can make some remarks upon the expansion of the internal economic network of Lan Xang. That is, from the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards the tradition of founding inscriptions broadly diffused through the kingdom and the number of newly founded inscriptions also rapidly increased. After 1560 when the capital moved from Luang Phabang to Vientiane, the founding of inscriptions prevailed beyond Vientiane through the upper region of northeastern Thailand³⁶. Up to 1700, inscriptions could be seen in Luang Phabang, Vientiane and their vicinities together with the upper region of northeastern Thailand. We can further surmise that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the internal economic network prevailed in an area in the shape of a triangle. Its vertex was situated on Luang Phabang and the base consisted of a line connecting Meuang Dan Sai (in Loei Province, Thailand), Meuang Nong Han Noi (in Udon Thani Province, Thailand) and Meuang That Phanom (in Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand). Each town above played an important role in trading with neighboring countries, namely, Luang Phabang was linked to Yunnan and the upper reaches of the Mekong River, Meuang Dan Sai and Meuang Nong Han Noi to Ayutthaya, and Meuang That Phanom to Cambodia and the central part of Vietnam.

One noteworthy point is that the relocation of the capital from Luang Phabang to Vientiane was carried out in the middle of the expansion of the internal economic network from the northwest to the southeast. As examined in the previous section, from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards Ayutthaya and Cambodia came to need Lao products more and more in order to meet the increasing international demand for forest products and precious metals. Under this situation, the one-time foreign trade of Lan Xang, with its commercial center at Luang Phabang, closely relating to the “northern inland areas”, was compelled to turn its eyes towards the trade with the “southern coastal area”. Several principalities, such as Meuang Dan Sai, Meuang Nong Han Noi and Meuang That Phanom, gradually grew in importance as connecting points between Lan Xang and the “southern coastal area”. It goes without saying that Vientiane, which was better situated than Luang Phabang with respect to the principal trade routes linking Lan Xang with Ayutthaya, Cambodia and the central part of Vietnam, became the most important commercial center of the kingdom³⁷. Consequently, the southeastward shift of the center of the Lan Xang economy, evidently seen in the expansion of the internal economic network together

with the shift of the commercial center, was another response to the new economic situation in Southeast Asia.

5. Conclusion

With the rapid expansion of international maritime trade in Southeast Asia, from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards Ayutthaya and Cambodia's need for products from Laos escalated more and more in response to the increasing international demand for forest products and precious metals. This caused the center of the Lan Xang economy to shift southeast. Whether or not there existed a military threat from the neighboring kingdoms and a geographical limitation in producing foodstuff, Luang Phabang had to hand over its position as a capital to Vientiane sooner or later.

For all that, it does not mean that Luang Phabang lost the economic role completely after the relocation of the capital. In reality, Luang Phabang kept its importance as a local collecting center of commodities throughout. As far as considering the distribution status of Buddhist inscriptions (see Table 3 again), we find that even after 1560 the ruling classes still supported Buddhist monasteries in Luang Phabang and its vicinities as before. This seems to indirectly reflect their intentions of securing political influence in the region in order not to allow the profit that they had gained from commerce to fall into the hands of the neighboring kingdoms. In other words, the relocation of the capital possibly showed the confidence of the ruling classes that they could control the economic activities in northern Laos, even though the central government stood in Vientiane.

Vientiane was not shaped into a new center of Lan Xang by an excellent leader. The changing economic situation in mainland Southeast Asia caused Vientiane to gradually grow in commercial importance. The ruling classes and large numbers of merchants were drawn toward this affluent city in order to substantially increase their profit from international trade. Even the Lan Xang king was merely one of those attracted to the wealth of Vientiane. The relocation of the capital from Luang Phabang to Vientiane was one of the most symbolic responses to the changes of the economic situation in the then mainland Southeast Asia.

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¹ This paper is a revised version of a part of my book, entitled *Prawattisat Setthakit khong Ratchaanacak Lao Lan Xang Samai Kritsattawat thi 14~17* [The Economic History of Lao Lan Xang Kingdom in the 14~17th Centuries]. in Thai. Bangkok: Matichon (2003).

² Transcription of Lao proper nouns into Roman script in this paper is based on [Stuart-Fox 2008]. Even though “x” is pronounced as “s”, I have retained the

conventional distinction between “x” and “s” to indicate the Lao spelling.

³ “Forest products” in this paper mean non-timber forest products (NTFPs) which are defined as any biological resources obtained from forests except timber used as building material. They include wild game, bamboo, rattan, edible and medicinal plants, spices, resin, fragrant wood, and other things.

⁴ Ethnic groups in Laos have been classified into three broad categories, that is, Lao Loum (Lao of the lowlands), Lao Theung (Lao of the mountain slopes) and Lao Soung (Lao of the mountain tops). For details, see [Stuart-Fox 1998: 1-2]. Though this classification is not officially used at present, I would like to use it for the sake of convenience in this paper.

⁵ Interview with Mr. Singkham Inthavong, Luang Phabang District, Luang Phabang Province, Laos on April 5, 1999.

⁶ For details on the economic relations between Lao Loum people and Lao Theung people, see [Masuhara 2003: 136-8, 142-9].

⁷ Meuang Viang Khuk is an ancient town along the Mekong River, situated between Thabo District and Meuang District of Nongkhai Province, Thailand.

⁸ For details on the “Age of Commerce”, see [Reid 1993: 10-24].

⁹ For details on the economic relations between the early Lan Xang (in the 14-15th centuries) and the “northern inland area”, see [Masuhara 2003: 13-25].

¹⁰ Meuang Viang Kham corresponds to current Thulakhom District, Vientiane Province, Laos, standing about 60 km to the north of Vientiane Capital.

¹¹ For details of the story, see [Souneth 1996: 144-145].

¹² A chronicle relates that King Fa Ngum captured cities from Kaen Thao (in Xainyaburi Province, Laos) to Nakhon Thai (in Phitsanulok Province, Thailand) and all the frontier cities, and then appointed Ba Chi Kae to be *Mun Kae* (to rule these territories) [Sila and Nuan 1994: 42]. *Mun* is one of the titles for high-ranking officials. *Mun Kae* thus means a high-ranking official to Meuang Viang Kae. Therefore, Meuang Viang Kae was probably situated somewhere between the Huang River basin and the upper reaches of the Pa Sak River in Thailand.

¹³ Meuang Phra Nam Hung was situated in present Pakxan District, Borikhamxai Province, Laos [Souneth 1996: 182].

¹⁴ Meuang Pak Huay Luang corresponds to current Phonphisai District, Nongkhai Province, Thailand [Dhawaj 1987: 72].

¹⁵ Meuang Xiang Sa was a city near the mouth of the Sa River, to the south of the Kading River, Laos [Souneth 1996: 182].

¹⁶ My translation from Thai version.

¹⁷ Kling was a tribe of the Tamil ethnic group, who came from India [FAD 1985: 43].

¹⁸ My translation from Japanese version.

¹⁹ My translation from Thai version.

²⁰ The Gujarat Kingdom was located on the Gulf of Cambay, western India.

²¹ My translation from Japanese version.

²² Aden is a port city in Yemen, located on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

²³ My translation from Japanese version.

²⁴ My translation from Thai version.

²⁵ As Yoneo Ishii also states, there is still some doubt about the compiling periods of the aforementioned three laws and we have to admit possibilities that some corrections, deletions and revisions were made in the manuscripts in later periods. Nevertheless, they still have considerable value in concretely indicating the ruling areas of Ayutthaya [Ishii 1999: 129, 141-142, 152-154, 159-160].

²⁶ However, this inference would have a problem in connection with the compiling year of *Phra Ayakaan Tamnaeng Na Thahaan Huameuang* (1466). It is possibly that accounts concerning *Meuang Ek*, *Meuang Tho*, and *Meuang Tri* were added to the original text in a later period.

²⁷ This reign corresponds to that of King Xetthathirat (1548-71) of Lan Xang.

²⁸ It is generally understood that this inscription was founded as evidence for promising friendly relations and as a border stone between Lan Xang and Ayutthaya [Dhawaj 1987: 98].

²⁹ Tatsuo Hoshino argues that when the powers of Meuang Suwa (Luang Phabang) attacked central Siam, they usually went down along the Pa Sak River by boat and appeared around Saraburi and Lopburi. This was a common military route (of Lan Xang) from the Ayutthaya period to the reign of the third king of the Bangkok Dynasty [Hoshino 1990: 206].

³⁰ Basan is situated on the left bank of the Mekong River, about 45 km to the northeast of Phnom Penh.

³¹ The text of this version is given in [LLD 1967: 1-65]. Khun Burom, called Khun Borom in some versions, is widely believed to be the first Lao ruler.

³² According to the traditional Lao calendar, the names of the years are formed by combining two cycles called Mae Meu (Mother of days) and Luk Meu (Child of days). *Mae Meu* consists of ten years, each having a different number (from one to ten) so that each number recurs every tenth year. *Luk Meu* consists of twelve years, each having an animal name so that the name of each animal recurs every twelfth year. The complete combination gives sixty years with different names. Therefore, the year of “*Tao-Yi* (Nine - Tiger)” circles every sixty years. For more details on the cyclical years, see [Phetsarath 1959: 104-105]

³³ The text of this version is given in [LLD 1967: 66-147].

³⁴ Theravada Buddhism developed in Sri Lanka and spread to the mainland Southeast Asian countries except Vietnam.

³⁵ In the examination of the distribution of Lao Buddhist inscriptions in this paper, I owe all data to the materials as follows: [Gagneux 1975], [Dhawaj 1987], [SMH 1977] and [Souneth et al. 1992]. However, the only detailed studies on Lao Buddhist inscriptions apply to those in Vientiane and northeastern Thailand (See [Gagneux

1975] and [Dhawaj 1987]). Thus we cannot help admitting that for lack of data, the following analysis is restricted from the outset.

³⁶ The “upper region of northeastern Thailand” corresponds to the present five provinces of Loei, Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom.

³⁷ To be precise, Meuang Viang Khuk was the most important commercial center of Lan Xang. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Van Wuysthoff, a merchant employed by the Dutch East India Company, actually described that Meuang Viang Khuk was probably the principal commercial city [of Lan Xang] and merchandise flowed in [Viang Khuk] from every part [of the kingdom] in order to be sold in the market [Lejosne 1987: 128]. It can be said that Vientiane was the political center of Lan Xang, whereas Viang Khuk was its economic center. In this paper, however, the two adjacent cities are treated as a united capital area.

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